

2040  
CHRISTIAN FORBEARANCE Explained and  
Enforced.

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S E R M O N,

Preached before the ASSOCIATE PRES-  
BYTERY of Glasgow, at *Beith*, on the  
31st, of July; being a day appointed  
for Presbyterial Humiliation and  
prayer.

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B Y  
JAMES RAMSAY, *Minister* of the GOSPEL in  
the ASSOCIATE CONGREGATION of GLASGOW.

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G L A S G O W:

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CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS  
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( vi )  
**T**HE occasion of composing and preaching the sermon now offered to the public was this,—Some people in sundry congregations, under the inspection of the *Associate Presbytery* of Glasgow, having taken offence at the practice of those Ministers who, in the administration of the Lord's supper, do not take the bread and cup into their hands before prayer and thanksgiving,—applied to the Presbytery for, what they called, a redress of grievances, and to injoin upon their members strict uniformity in the manner of dispensing the sacrament. The presbytery, though much averse to engage in that business, were obliged at different meetings to spend much time upon it, both in private and public; and at length agreed to represent the state of matters in their bounds to the *Associate Synod* in May last, and crave advice. The Synod *unanimously* advised *mutual forbearance* in the point of order, and, if the Presbytery found any farther difficulty in dealing with the people, that they should call in the assistance of brethren in other Presbyteries, for obtaining acquiescence in their advice. The ferment, so far from being checked, continued to spread, to operate with greater violence, and produced several remonstrances against the advice of the Synod, together with petitions for a full discussion and final determination of the cause. The Presbytery considering this as a louder call to the exercises of humiliation and prayer, in which they had formerly been engaged; and having appointed their next meeting at *Beith*, where the distractions had been carried to an extraordinary height, agreed to observe the first part of the day in public humiliation and prayer, to request the assistance of brethren in the Presbytery of *Stirling*, and in appointing the author of this discourse to preach before them upon that occasion. Fully satisfied with the advice of Synod himself, and grieved that it met with so little attention and submission amongst the people, he took that opportunity

opportunity of communicating his sentiments and feelings to a numerous audience gathered from different quarters, on the best plan, which occurred to him, for conveying instruction, and for impressing their minds with the importance and propriety of *forbearance*;—intending so soon as providence should give him a few weeks vacation from public labours; to comply with the often repeated and earnest solicitations of some, whose judgment he has been long accustomed to respect, to enter more particularly and directly into the merits of the cause, with a view of removing the prejudices, and allaying the heats of those who are disposed to hearken to reason. The discourse, as might have been expected, was variously received. It is published at the desire of some brethren of the Presbytery and others. What was farther intended in this troublesome and, it is a pity any should have occasion to add, threatening debate, goes along with it. That the Lord may break this snare of the adversary, cause his people to escape, give them peace, and bless the several means which have been used for these ends, is the hearty prayer of

JAMES RAMSAY.



Eph. iv. 2.

—*Forbearing one another in love.*

**I**N this chapter the apostle begins, what may be called, the practical part of the epistle. Having laid the foundation in the preceding chapters, he proceeds to raise the superstructure. He has instructed the Ephesians in various doctrines of grace, and set before them many invaluable privileges, which they were partakers of through Christ. It now remains, that he lead them to the evangelical performance of duty, in the lively faith of those doctrines, and in the suitable improvement of these privileges. All the blessings of their new state were comprehended in their *calling* to the fellowship of Christ: That was a high, a heavenly and a holy calling; and the sum of all he had to urge upon them was, a *walking worthy of their vocation*;—in a manner becoming it;—so as to edify their brethren, and recommend their calling to them who were still far off. He points out several particulars which claimed their attention, if they meant to comply with his exhortation, and demonstrate themselves worthy of this glorious calling. Some of these are mentioned in the verse now read.

*Lowliness*: This is opposed to pride, and denotes a low estimate of ourselves, in all we are and have, whether as men or christians. A grace, in which our apostle himself shone conspicuous. He accounted himself the chief of sinners, but less than the least of all saints, and did not think that he was worthy

to be called an apostle.—*Meekness*; which is not easily provoked by the offences of others, and is careful not to give them ground of offence. It stands opposite to a hasty passionate spirit, ready to kindle by every spark; a spirit which always exalts folly, and makes a man like a city broken down and without walls.—*Long suffering*; which seems to denote a high degree of patience and meekness, and easily submits to the greatest injuries, even though persisted in, without thoughts of revenge.

The apostle adds in the words intended for the subject of discourse, *forbearing one another in love*. The word may be read *tolerating* one another; and thus it always implies something evil or offensive about the person to be borne with. And though we must not call evil good, about any man, yet we are to forbear rigidly exacting it, especially upon our brethren in Christ: or *abstaining* from one another, intimating, that Christians will find much about one another, in the present state, to beget alienation, and to procure resentment; but that they are studiously to avoid that improvement of it, to which their corruptions will certainly prompt them. Or *supporting* one another, signifying that the most eminent saint may become a burden to his brethren; but he is not on that account to be cast off and forsaken. We are to have compassion on him in his infirmities, and, in the meekness and condescension of Christ, readily to yield our shoulder. Hence it appears, that the forbearance here recommended comprizes the several graces before mentioned and their regular exercise toward our brethren. It is to be *forbearance* in love; not upon principles of hypocrisy and deceit, nor from selfish considerations of our dependence upon them, or expectations from them; but in *love*; first to Christ our elder brother and head of the family, to whom we owe our all; and then in love to our brethren as the members of Christ, bearing his image,  
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under his care and devoted to his glory :—*servent and disinterested love to them as saints.* We propose to *explain* a little further the forbearance recommended in our text, and then to suggest some considerations to *enforce* it, with some short improvement. For the further *explication* of this forbearance, we observe,

**FIRST,** It must never be exercised at the expence of truth or any other duty. Some make their pretended love to the brethren an excuse for their want of zeal about the truths of the gospel, and will not scruple to bury the most valuable interests of the Redeemers kingdom in the grave of unscriptural forbearance. This *Laodicean* spirit is become so much the fashion of our times, that if a man venture to walk abroad without it, he appears contemptible. Hence the indignation, reproach and opposition, which a faithful testimony for Christ meets with in these lands. It must be cursed for the ungodliness of zeal, and its adherents shall be branded for bigots or madmen. But these things should not move us. Our respect to brethren must never interfere with what we owe to the Lord who bought us ; otherwise we set them in his place, and aver they have laid us under greater obligations than he has done. *Truth* is a pearl of great price, for the acquisition of which we cannot take too much pains, and which we cannot guard with too much attention. When we do any thing against it, we appear in arms against Christ and his kingdom ; when we exert ourselves, in all ways which are competent, for its safety and honour, its preservation and transmission, it is but our reasonable service. We are, at the call of God, to sacrifice our reputation, our liberty,—even our lives for its sake. He that enjoins us to forbear one another in love, also commands us to ‘ contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.’ (a) Who was more distinguished for forbearance than *Paul* ? but who was more zealous for the truth ? ‘ He gave place by sub-

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• Jude 2.



jection no not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue in the church.' (b) He was willing to be offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith. (c)—Nor is forbearance ever to be laid as a bar to the performance of any other duty. This would set the law of Christ at variance with itself, form our conduct on the principles of the *Pharisees*, who did some things, but neglected other things of equal or greater importance, and make the christian course very confined and very crooked. Christian duty, like evangelical truth, stands in so close a connexion, that he who offends in one point, is guilty in all. Every branch of obedience must be attended to, according to the place which it holds in the law of liberty. No one duty must thrust out another or be an apology for neglecting it; nor if we duly observe the rule, will we find one an obstruction to another, but, on the contrary, a help to the performance of it.

SECONDLY, It is perfectly consistent with using all means of conviction, and even with administering reproof, if it is necessary. No regard to our brother, or forbearance in love, can oblige us to suffer him to ly peaceably under a mistake, or in the ditch of offence. On the contrary, that christian love, upon which forbearance is grafted, requires that we do every thing which we warrantably may, to inform his judgment, awaken his conscience and check his corruptions. If we allow him to wander in darkness, when we can hold out some lights, or to remain in offence unconvicted, when it is in our power to detect his fault and recover him, we really hate our brother in our heart. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise re-buke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.' (d) Thus our Lord forbore his disciples, but he took occasion sometimes to reprove them sharply (e) 10A-  
Agreeable

3 Gal. 2. 5. c Phil. 2. 17. d Lev. 19. 17. e Matth. xvi. 23. Luke ix. 55. Chap. xxiv. 25.



agreeable to this, was Paul's conduct toward another eminent apostle. He exercised forbearance; for his love to him and communion with him, were preserved invaluable; but that did not hinder to point out his sin with the circumstances of it in the strongest light, and to rebuke him openly on account of it (f.) And what is lawful and proper between two Christians, will, in so far, apply to any particular church, with which we are connected. If we can do any thing to help her, when falling from the truth or from the purity of ordinances, that is not to be withheld. She has an undoubted claim to our assistance, and ought gratefully to receive it.

But here a two fold caution is to be observed. The *one* is, that we be thoroughly satisfied by the word and spirit of God, as the fruit of diligent enquiry and fervent prayer, that we have truth and duty upon our side; and consequently that our brethren are really under the power of mistake and defiled with offence; because without this, we try to darken instead of enlightening them by our zealous pains. So far from turning them out of the by-path into the high way, we endeavour to take them off the latter and set them in the former; the consequences of which may, in many respects, be fatal both to them and us. In this case too, all our reproofs are groundless and misapplied. We deserve the rod of correction ourselves, while, secure in our mistake, we presume to administer it, and perhaps with severity to our brethren. The *other* caution is, that we preserve the christian temper in all these dealings with them, that it may appear to their conviction, both by what is said and the manner of expressing it, that we are impelled by love, not enmity; that we act under the influence of gracious humility, not of pride; that we have their welfare sincerely at heart, and do not seek occasions of asserting our pre-eminence.

eminence, or of venting our malignity and gratifying our spleen; because without this, our endeavours will certainly be frustrated.

THIRDLY, It is opposed to a *captious* spirit, and a readiness to break up christian fellowship upon slender and unjustifiable grounds. A captious spirit watches for the halting of brethren, and rejoices when it can perceive either of their legs unequal. If occasions be afforded, it catches at them with hasty eagerness, as a dying man would at life; they are a rich entertainment to pride, malice or envy. It is sure to aggravate every step, be it ever so inadvertent, or the temptation ever so forcible, in the highest degree possible. It can easily convert a small mistake into a dangerous *heresy*, and swell every *straw* to the size of a mountain. Nay it may, and often does, find matter of warm debate and contention, where there is none.—A forbearing spirit again, is pained at the falls, or even the stumbling of brethren. It never attempts to make things greater or worse than they really are, but rather will palliate and excuse them, as far as possible. On many occasions, it is blind to their miscarriages: and what it cannot fail to observe, it tries to draw a veil over, in relation to itself and others. Hence the beautiful and striking account, which the apostle gives of christian love in its proper exercise. ‘It suffereth long and is kind; it envieth not: it vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,’ (g.) You see much of this precious grace and its native operations in Paul’s epistles to the churches, in which many roots of bitterness had sprung up, troubled and defiled them; particularly in those to the Corinthians and Galatians.

A captious

A captious spirit makes very light of the fellowship of christian brethren, be it ever so important, sacred and fruitful. It can burst every, the strongest bond; for a trifling difference of opinion or practice; nay, can wantonly sacrifice it to an old custom crept in, no man knows how; to prejudice, to humour, to whim or a disposition to make noise in the church.—A forbearing spirit again, puts a proper estimate upon the communion of fellow Christians both in public and private. There are doubtless grounds and occasions, on which it must part with the most esteemed and gracious friends, in point of visible church fellowship, for Christ's sake. Better part company with all the world than separate from his cause; and a wise man knoweth both time and judgment. But it will not sport with an object so sacred. It will preserve that endeared and gainful correspondence at the expence of many things. It will not fly off, till it be thoroughly satisfied that the grounds of the rupture will bear the severest examination of the infallible word; that they nearly concern the glory of Christ and affect the essential interests of his kingdom; that they are in a word, so weighty and important, that the Christian can have all freedom, upon these very grounds to offer his life at a stake or a gibbet. Nor even then will it think itself justified in dissolving former connexions, till all methods of maintaining them without sin have proved unsuccessful, and forbearance has been carried to the utmost length of scripture. When it must take farewell, it will be with reluctance and regret; heartily grieved that Satan and the corruptions of men should have pushed things to so mournful an extremity. For it is of the very nature of this spirit, as much as is possible, to live peaceably with all men, and especially with the household of faith. This leads us to observe,

FOURTHLY, That christian forbearance is of very considerable extent. Many carry it beyond all the limits



limits of reason and scripture; in so much that in various places the church has the appearance of a thick, overgrown wilderness, rather than of a garden inclosed, regularly planted and carefully dressed. It has laid the holy city, even amongst the churches of the reformation, so much under the feet of the Gentiles, that one would almost take her for *Babylon*, rather than the Jerusalem that came down from God out of heaven. This cannot pass for lawful forbearance. It is an unfathomable gulf, that swallows up the glory of Christ and the best interests of his people; a principle so wildly loose as, if followed out, would soon convert the purest religious societies on earth into so many synagogues of Satan. But we are afraid there is much danger on the other hand, either of casting the exercise of forbearance out from the system of duties altogether, or of so straitning its operation, that it can be of no use in the church. The Lord's people themselves, the most precious, and, in many things, well instructed are in danger. The more warm and zealous their spirits are, with the better prospect is the snare spread for them. We shall therefore take the liberty of pointing out certain lengths to which it appears to us, that christian forbearance may warrantably, and ought necessarily to be extended.

*First*, It extends to all kinds of personal injuries. 'Forbearing, says the apostle, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye,' (b.) It makes no difference whether these offences be great or small, more or less aggravated, be of shorter or longer continuance; not even a refusal to give satisfaction, or an obstinate unprovoked persisting in them, is to stand in the way of cordial forgiveness. We always mean in so far as these offences are committed against us personally. If any shall, by injuring us, violate the laws of society, he must bear his burden.

If



If life or property be invaded, why not claim the protection of law? The Magistrate beareth not the sword in vain; nor has Christ rendered his followers the necessary prey of fraud and of violence. It is also to be observed that we may neither usurp God's place, nor that of church rulers acting in his name. We cannot pardon sin as against God, nor can we purge the scandals of offending brethren by our private personal absolution. But still in so far as these are debts contracted with us, we are obliged to cancell them. 'But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and, persecute you.' This is the spirit of the direction immediately preceding, 'whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also: and if any man will sue thee at law, and take away thy coat; let him have thy cloke also.' (i)—In one place, indeed, forbearance and forgiveness seem to be suspended upon the repentance of the party. 'If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.' (k) But our Lord in this passage evidently means forgiveness, with restoration to favour and former intimacy; which can neither be with safety to ourselves nor justice to the offender, where there are no satisfying evidences of his penitence. He cannot be understood as speaking of simple forgiveness, or of dropping resentment against an offending brother; for were this suspended upon repentance, in numberless instances might we live all our days in variance and enmity. Accordingly when directing Peter on that subject, he neither mentions this nor any other condition. 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but until seventy times seven.

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Matth. v. 39.—44.

&amp; Luke xvii. 3.

'seven:' (1) intimating that no bounds are to be set. So often as offences are committed, they are to be frankly forgiven.

This is a point which we fear is too little attended to by professors of religion. If the offence be small, they think themselves obliged to get over it; but if it is great, repeated, and if no satisfaction can be obtained, they are apt to justify themselves in suffering it to dwell in their minds, and in seeking opportunities of resenting it one way or another. So little weight has the authority of Christ, and to such a degree has the love of many waxen cold! This we the more insist upon, because fully perswaded, that if forbearance were duly exercised in such instances, differences and misunderstandings in other things would often be either entirely prevented or very much lessened. We shall not absolutely affirm; but it appears to us with a high degree of evidence, that all the schisms and unwarrantable separations that ever obtained in the church, to the dishonour of Christ and scandal of religion, have either originated in, or been exceedingly cherished by an unforbearing spirit in matters of personal offence, real or supposed. After mens personal interests have been struck at, or their pride is offended, it has been easy to find the whole cause of God and truth at stake in the decision of the controversy.

*Secondly*, It extends to things in themselves *indifferent*. By a thing *indifferent* we mean, an action which is neither commanded nor forbidden; and therefore may either be done or not, without censure fixed upon our conduct by the word. Were not the prejudices or the passions of men engaged, it would be manifest, that it is not sufficient to determine any thing to be *not* indifferent, that we have always considered it as an object of importance; that custom and  
education

education have invariably presented it to us in this light ; or that many great and wise men have spoke and wrote in favour of our opinion. Undoubtedly that is a thing indifferent, whatever it be, about which the word of God either in express terms, or by just and necessary consequence, leaves us to our liberty ; whatever sentiments we or others have adopted, and been accustomed to entertain concerning it. It would be easy to point out a variety of such things, even relating to the worship of God ; but they shall at present be left to your own attentive reflection. Only, that things of this nature are objects of forbearance, the scripture is clear and express. The observation of certain rites of the ceremonial law, particularly in relation to meats and days, was for a season intirely indifferent in the christian church ; for the apostle declares it was enough, that every man was fully perswaded in his own mind. If any had freedom to observe these rites, he might observe them without sin for the present : because though the law of commandments contained in ordinances was abrogated by the death of Christ, that consequence of his death was not sufficiently notified to the church. He, again, that disregarded them was under no obligation to the contrary, but hereby gave evidence that he was more enlightned about the new dispensation. Thus forbearance was to be exercised ;—‘ Let not him that eateth, saye the apostle, despise him that eateth not ; and let not him who eateth not judge him that eateth : for God hath received him.—Why dost thou judge thy brother ? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother ? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.’ (m) In like manner, the eating of things sacrificed to idols was, in itself, indifferent ; for the same apostle having observed, that ‘ an idol is nothing in the world,’ subjoins, ‘ neither if we eat are we the better ; neither if we eat not are we

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'he worse.' Hence he directs, 'if any of them that believe not, bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you eat, asking no questions for conscience sake.'<sup>(n)</sup> This too he represents as a matter of forbearance; and the only rule he lays down is, that none should eat with offence: 'But take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak:' for many things are lawful, which are not expedient; those things that are lawful may not edify. And in things indifferent, the expediency and edification of brethren, supposing them weak in extreme, is to determine the observation or neglect of them.

The reason of such things being the object of forbearance is both plain and forcible. Where Christ, our common Lord, has left us and our brethren at liberty, we have no right to bind them up. In so much as pretending it, we presumptuously desert our own sphere, invade the Redeemer's throne, and attempt to wreath a yoke of bondage upon the necks of the free subjects of his kingdom. In such cases, instead of yielding to our pretensions, they are obliged to defend the honour of their master and their own privileges against our daring blasphemous encroachments. 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free: and be not entangled again by the yoke of bondage.' But you said, for the sake of my edification they ought to submit. Do not mistake. What we say is, that it is your business to get over your weak prejudices, and to be in the diligent use of all proper means for that end. If you have not success, if the thing in question be really indifferent and acknowledged to be such by your brethren, and if, at the same time, it be not pressed upon them *as necessary*; it appears to us, that they may and ought to yield for the sake of peace, and for the sake of your weak conscience. But, to abstract from o-  
other



ther things, if it is pressed upon them *as necessary* from the command of Christ, it appears to us in the strongest light, that they ought not to yield : because you are adding to the law of Christ, and maintain your false opinions and prejudices to be the rule of faith and duty. In that case, by their submission, they consent to, and support your bold invasion of our Lord's sovereignty, cast off his authority and declare themselves the servants of men. The example of our apostle is fully to our purpose. When *circumcision* was left as a matter of *indifference*, no man could be more condescending than he. To the weak he became as weak. He even circumcised Timothy because of the Jews who were in those quarters ; and that after the famous decision at Jerusalem about the obligation of the ceremonial law (o) But when it was pressed as *binding* by the authority of Christ and *necessary* to salvation, in Galatia, in Antioch and other places, he would not give place by subjection, no, not for an hour ; but every where warned the churches against such usurpations. ' Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing. How turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage ?' (p)

*Thirdly*, It extends to matters which are *doubtful*. We do not mean things which this and the other *careless* and *sceptical* person may see meet to call doubtful : for in this way we might soon compliment the whole christian system by *retail* to one or another ; and shall be obliged to surrender it in bulk and at once to multitudes. Is there a single point of revealed truth, but one or other wavering mind hesitates about, or openly denies ? Some pretend, that no certainty is to be expected in any part of it. They either rebel so much against the light, or are so indolent, or so much are

are they cursed with a dark, a suspicious and unestablished mind.—We mean such things as are not determined by the word of God,—things about which it affords us *no light*. And of these there are many. Though the Lord has revealed to us all things necessary to his glory upon earth, and to our welfare in the present state; his infinite sovereign wisdom has seen meet to keep the veil upon many things. These *must* be doubtful. It is but probable conjecture the most penetrating mind is capable of in relation to them; and there is always danger in prying into those things which we have not seen, attempting to be wise above what is written.—Or such things as the word does not set in a *clear and determinate light*, but sparingly and obscurely hints at;—in such a way as to exercise our deepest attention and most diligent enquiries; such things, accordingly, as the most learned and studious, the most enlightened, zealous and faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, have, after all their dependence, diligence and most fervent prayers, differed about: such for instance, as the *magistrates power in matters of religion*; the *order of regeneration and justification*; the *nature and manner of God's dispensation towards the unconverted elect*; the *proper place of faith, and the manner in which it terminates upon its object*; the *precise nature of God's transactions with Israel at Sinai*; and a hundred other things of the like nature. And you will here observe, that though a particular circumstance of worship or church order, be expressly mentioned in scripture; it may still be *doubtful* in this respect, that the best instructed and most eminent Christians, of confessed soundness in the faith, may differ about the *meaning and obligation* of that circumstance: for it is not the letters, syllables and sound of the scripture, but the sense of it, or the mind of the spirit therein expressed, which is the rule of faith and practice.

Now

Now, that such things are matters of forbearance, seems clear. 'Him that is weak in the faith receive ye; but not to doubtful disputations.' (q) Do not trouble him with points, concerning which there is still ground to hesitate. Do not obstruct his entrance among you with disquieting and perplexing disputes. Neither attempt to impose your sentiments upon him; nor let his unavoidable weakness shut the door of your fellowship upon him. The apostle has the same objects in view, as in the verses before quoted. This is plain from the connexion. For the present they were *indifferent*, we said. The usages refer, to might, or might not be observed, without blame; but in another point of view they were *doubtful*; because much might have been offered on both sides; and Christians might have been very faithful to Christ, which side soever they espoused in their judgment, reasonings and practice in that controversy. — The reason of this, too, is obvious. In disputable points, there is not sufficient light to determine whose opinion or practice is best. The minds of both parties may be tolerably satisfied that scripture is upon their side; but while the one fails of carrying conviction to the other, who shall judge between them? And if there be no umpire what remains but mutual forbearance? My judgment and conscience is not to be regulated by those of any other man; nor is his to be regulated by mine. If neither the one nor other can consent to see with the eyes of his brother, what is the alternative but to forbear one another in love?

*Fourthly*, It extends to those things which the church has *not attained*. The purest church upon earth is only going on to perfection. She has not been enlightned in the whole will of God. Her sun, under all her privileges and attainments, like that of a single believer, is only ascending to his meridian. And after a course of apostacy and corruption, it is sometimes long ere she recover what has been lost.

Many



Many things, both from within and without, may retard her progress. What has been attained of the mind of God, in doctrine, worship, discipline or government, ought to be held fast by her, in her united state, and by her several members. What, upon clear scripture grounds, has been adopted into her confession and testimony, may not be dropt to gratify the most distinguished Christian that ever adorned the gospel, nor upon any other consideration whatsoever. Nor may she receive any into her communion who takes, or claims a liberty of opposing, or even of despising and trampling upon any piece of reformation, which the Lord has honoured her with: because, in so far, she sacrifices her faithfulness and purity to his ignorance or presumption. Such treachery will sound an alarm to the faithful, who have just views of the bonds, the nature and design of church fellowship.—But the case is quite different as to matters, which the church and our brethren have not reached; about which perhaps they have not so much as been instructed; and therefore could not take into the public confession and testimony. Make the most favourable supposition: that, through the peculiar kindness of God, high degrees of spiritual illumination have attended our researches, so that we clearly perceive this and the other point of doctrine to be true, this and the other circumstance in her worship and order to be scriptural and proper; yet is the church with which we are connected, are our brethren, her members, in the dark about one or both of these, and after all their enquiries cannot see as we do? Is not forbearance then reasonable and necessary?

There is a difference, indeed, between those religious connections that are going on with a grievous and, in appearance, perpetual backsliding; perhaps obstinately spurning at the means of recovery, like this national church; or those who have fixed the utmost limits of reformation, not in the least disposed



to learn the way of the Lord more perfectly; under the proud conceit, that they have attained all possible, or at least all necessary, degrees of purity and reformation, like the national church of England at the reformation under queen *Elizabeth*:—And those who, though unenlightened about many things, and therefore unable to make all the progress which we wish, hold themselves open to conviction, are solicitous to be better taught of God, and heartily disposed to follow wheresoever he shall be pleased to lead them. As to the *first*; it appears evident, we are not to forbear them in the way of church communion; but are obliged to provide for the glory of Christ and our own edification by *Secession*, so soon as a door is opened in providence. As to the *other*; it appears no less evident, that we are to bear with them; waiting, hoping and praying, that the Lord would carry on the good work which he has begun among them, and perfect what is lacking in their faith and knowledge. The apostle suggests this rule, ‘let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.’ (1) He seems to be speaking of the different degrees of light and knowledge among the *Philippians* and other churches, about some points of doctrine and circumstances of worship, particularly in relation to the mosaical law. So far as agreed, he would have them improve their unity, and walk according to that rule: And as to those points, about which some were more enlightened than others, that the forbearance should be mutual; the more perfect waiting upon those who were less so, in expectation of their graciously obtaining the same discoveries: the latter, again, taking the benefit of the superior knowledge of the former.

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and in all depending on the spirit of truth for further instruction. The reason is ; it becomes no man to dictate to his brethren ; for we have one master even Christ. And it must be a fearful abuse of our light, to improve it for an angry over-bearing debate and contention, which may issue in a rupture with those who are no less upright, conscientious and faithful than ourselves.

But, will one say, then I must *bury* the truth. How? hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Is not that much? make the very best of the truth as the Lord enables ; take all prudent methods of communicating it to others ; but wait till the Lord see meet to bless the means ; and neither fly off from your brethren, nor despise them, because you are, in deep sovereignty, more favoured of the Lord than they are. You cannot reasonably expect they should hold pace with you till they are as much enlarged. But the church has attained—*what* has she attained? a piece of undoubted scriptural reformation, avowed to all in her subordinate standards? or is it a *custom* and *usage* ; an usage sometimes, and by some of her ministers or members observed, at other times and by other ministers or members not observed ; an usage, the meaning and import, the strict and proper obligation of which she had not duly examined ; perhaps an usage too, which afterwards, in times of greater light and further reformation, was dropt as not necessary and obligatory? Will you call this a piece of reformation attained upon clear scripture ground, embodied in her public testimony and uniformly adhered to? Or will any wise man attempt to prove the comparison? In a word,

*Fifthly*, Forbearance is to be exercised in *all* cases, where truth and a good conscience are not injured. Where one or other of these is hurt, or in unavoidable danger of being so, we have admitted, that forbearance can have no place in a state of church fellowship.

ship. Every thing ought to bow to *their* safety. But it also deserves your attention, that both these may be in as great security as can be expected in this world, when tender, or weak and scrupulous Christians have taken a great alarm. Which of these was affected, when the members of the church of Jerusalem were cast into an uproar, on occasion of Peters going in to *Cornelius* and his friends, preaching the gospel, and baptizing them? (s) The ferment was as universal, and the outcry as loud, as if the whole cause of religion had been perfidiously betrayed, when it had not received the smallest harm. We think, in general, *truth* is not endangered by *us*, when we are permitted to possess it, to avow it openly, uniformly, in all ways which the word of God requires, and which our circumstances in providence render necessary and fit; nor by the *church* with which we are connected, when she discovers a readiness to receive and avow, to maintain and defend it, so soon as made known to her: And that a *good conscience* is not at all affected, in communion with our brethren, when no unwarrantable terms of church fellowship are directly, or by consequence, imposed upon us. Even at the commencement of the *Secession*, forbearance could have no place in this national church; because truth was fallen in her streets and equity could not enter. Not to say, that the faithful could not prevail to have truth judicially asserted in opposition to the daring attacks made upon it; and that they themselves were prohibited under severe penalties from avowing it; several precious articles of gospel doctrine were condemned in the supreme ecclesiastical court, and the grossest errors publicly, judicially patronized—And because unwarrantable terms of communion were imposed upon her ministers and members. Upon her *ministers*;—They could not be allowed to enter their dissents or protestations, for the exoneration of conscience;

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conscience, against the most iniquitous decisions, nor to utter a syllable in the pulpit under any grievance, or against the most tyrannical, destructive proceedings. They behoved, either to give the right hand of fellowship to them who preached *another gospel*, and who had by dint of the secular arm thrust themselves on the heritage of God, or desert the judicatures under pain of censure, at the pleasure of the managers. It was at their peril, if they administered sealing ordinances, on any consideration, to the Lord's oppressed people. By act of Parliament, they behoved to commence *king's messengers*, and profane the holy day of God, or be cast out of the church. Upon her *members*: for they were obliged to sit with impure, openly impure dogs in the sacraments, or want them; to hear a false gospel, or, in many corners, no gospel; to receive sealing ordinances from those whom Christ never sent, or be denied them; to give up with such ministers, as the Lord had made valiant for the truth, or be materially excommunicated together with them. Tell it not in *Gath*: publish it not in the streets of *Ashdod*. Conscious as we may be of manifold defects and mismanagements, we hope no such things are to be found amongst us. They must be scrupulous indeed, and either very ignorant or desperately prejudiced, who can imagine, that a difference of order in the dispensation of the Lord's supper, in a circumstance which, in the very nature of things, cannot possibly convey any symbolical and sacramental meaning, and which all parties allow cannot affect the nature of the ordinance; a circumstance, too, which not one of our standards received and approved by solemn oath, as founded upon and agreeable to the word of God, does either explicitly or implicitly acknowledge;—that such difference, we say, injures truth or defiles and imposes upon the conscience; while every church member is left to his own discreitive judgment, and every minister at liber-

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ty to observe the ordinary circumstance or not, as he sees meet. We hope posterity shall never come to the knowledge of such a pitiful controversy; but if they should, we are persuaded they must be ashamed, astonished and confounded, to think that it should have ever been agitated, so much as for a moment, in so enlightened, an established, and well ordered a society as the *Secession*. We shall now proceed,

II. To suggest some considerations to enforce the forbearance which we have endeavoured a little to explain.

FIRST, The authority of Christ enjoins it. His will in all things ought to be the reason and rule of our duty. Wherever it is interposed, we have no choice, nor are at liberty so much as to hesitate for a moment. To him we owe implicit obedience. Even when we cannot see the reason of his command, and when every thing in us and around us enters the most plausible and forcible remonstrances, absolute submission is our reasonable service: because we are sure his infinite wisdom cannot mistake, and that, in all instances, the sceptre of his kingdom must be a right sceptre.—Reflect whose command in this text enjoins us to forbear one another. Is it the direction of a man, of an angel? or is it not the command of the GREAT GOD, our Saviour, conveyed to us by his servant Paul, who spoke and wrote by his inspiration and authority? a command of as high authority as that great and leading one, to believe on the name of Jesus; a command which extends its obligation to all the churches to the end of time, as well as to those then in being, and to all christians no less than to the believing *Ephesians*:—a command, for obedience to which we must answer at the return of our Lord, which we spurn with, or trample upon at extreme hazard. Shall any Christian disregard it, or beg to be excused, who has heartily subjected himself to the Redeemer's gracious government

government, declaring often, and with all possible solemnity, that *his* pleasure shall be a law to him, and that he accounts it his happiness and honour to serve *him*? Whatever others do, shall you revolt? If they will presume to say we are own, will not you prove that you are his servants? And how prove it, but by a cheerful performance of what he requires? Alas that we should ever question, whether he be God, or *Baal* be God!

SECONDLY, The love of Christ should *constrain* us to it. Whether we consider Christ's love to us and our brethren, or the love which his people should express to him, we will find a powerful inducement. *His love to us*: for, not to insist upon other things, how many mistakes and offences does he bear with in us? Mistakes worse than inadvertent, often wilful; mistakes held after a long course of discipline by word and providence, and which we are not only not suitably concerned to have rectified, but frequently averse to have examined.—Offences many of which are of a heinous nature, committed against manifold warnings, clear light, deep convictions, invaluable privileges, and the most solemn voluntary engagements to the contrary. Unequalled, adorable love! He bears with us in all these! He does not upon those accounts, break up gracious correspondence with us! No; he knows our frame: His bowels are turned within him; his repentings are kindled together. He never carries the difference farther than a friendly, though it may be a sharp, reproof. Shall he forbear us, my brethren, in the debt of many ten thousand talents? And shall we have the confidence to refuse forbearance to others in the paltry debt of a very few pence; perhaps when they are not in our debt at all; the obligation being merely imaginary, no where to be found but in our own weak and foolish prejudices, or in our ignorant and erring consciences? Where is the person of this description, who



who will pretend interest in the love of Christ? How justly might his Lord deliver such a servant to the officer, with a charge to hale him to prison, from which he should not escape till he payed the very last mite. — *Our love to Christ*, if genuine and in exercise, will sweetly and powerfully constrain us to it. 'Forbearing one another, says the apostle, in love;' intimating, if that divine principle ruled in their hearts, they could not but see the propriety of forbearance, and be impelled to it irresistibly: For, if we love him that begot, can we fail to love those that are begotten of him for his sake, because they are his, and are like him? And what a multitude of lesser differences will not this extinguish? What a heap of sins will it not cover? 'Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all sins.' (t) It will not pick quarrels where there are none; will always put the best construction upon every thing which it can bear, and will cheerfully forgive, what it cannot justify or excuse. It will breathe the soft insinuating language of our apostle upon a most trying occasion; — Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am, for I am as ye are; ye have not injured me at all.' (u)

THIRDLY, The weakness of our judgment, and the contemptible proficiency we have made in knowledge, might evince the *reasonableness* and *propriety* of forbearance. I know there are some professors so wise in their own conceit, that it is next to blasphemy to question their discernment, or even to suspect their *infallibility*. Let such towering imaginations be marked down for their own value. But what shall we say of the most advanced christians in this world? Are they men? Or are they not rather children in understanding? Yes; very babes, and unskilful in the word of righteousness. 'We see through a glass darkly; we know but in part, and prophesy but in part. (u) If any man think that he knoweth any thing; he is so far deceived, that

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‘ he knoweth nothing, as he ought to know ! (k.)  
 The humble folk will very readily confess this :  
 ‘ Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have  
 not the understanding of a man.’ (y)

To what error and mistake are we not liable even in the plainest things ? How much more in those which are much harder to be understood, have never been carefully examined, nay, which may seldom, if ever, have fallen under our deliberate reflection. Are we not often in danger of putting light for darkness, and darkness for light ; of calling that truth which is error, and that duty which is sin ? Even when we are right, there is danger of contemplating the object through the false medium of prejudice and passion, not in the pure light of the word ; and consequently of raising what is very small to an extraordinary bulk, as well as of reducing what is exceeding great, almost to nothing. Which of us of any reflection, standing and experience, has not, in the course of his life, been convicted, at different times, of holding false opinions ? We were once confident of their truth, and could have risked almost any thing upon them ; and yet have lived to perceive and bewail our folly, and to espouse very different, if not opposite, sentiments. Are we more infallible at present, than we were many years ago ? If not, how dare we, especially in dark and doubtful things, be positive and intolerant toward our brethren ? A very moderate share of self-denial would teach us to fear they may be right and we wrong ; that when attempting to impose our sentiments upon them, we are shedding darkness and error upon their minds, or at least forcing that upon them as a *principal* concern, which is entitled to much inferior consideration. The danger should, doubtless, appear greater, when conscious, that we lean much more to our own understanding than to the Lord’s wisdom ; perhaps, that we never so much as, with any faith or fervency, begged his instruct-

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on; that we have been aiming more at our own interest or credit than at his glory; nay perhaps, that from pride, prejudice and passion, we have been totally disqualified for forming any deliberate judgment at all. Indeed the most conceited and positive, are usually the weakest and most worthless. There is not one instance in a hundred to the contrary.

But even suppose, we were sufficiently qualified to *dictate* to all the churches; should we not take compassion upon our poor benighted brethren, and not oblige them to swallow what would certainly choke them; or, contrary to their own conviction, to call this or the other thing, good and true, merely upon *our* testimony? This would suppose they must renounce their own reason and conscience, and, very submissively, put themselves into our leading strings. If our minds be so penetrating and comprehensive as to reach and unfold all mysteries; let us at least have pity on understandings of a less size; and as an evidence of this, wait for them and instruct them. If a man can travel at the rate of a hundred miles a day, it is certainly unreasonably to push and abuse me, because my utmost strength and exertion cannot make twenty. This leads us to observe,

FOURTHLY, That the forbearance of our brethren toward *us* should teach us *moderation* toward *them*. The apostle here supposes the forbearance to be mutual: *Forbearing one another in love*. If one yielded much, another would be obliged to yield no less to him; consequently there would be nothing on the score on either side. We are always apt to be partial to ourselves, and to suppose it impossible, that we should be as great burdens to any man, as multitudes are to us. Take our word for it, and all we believe, say or do, must be perfectly right. They are either very silly, or very malicious, who do not give us unlimited credit for this. Applied to others, we can soon perceive the absurdity, and sometimes

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heartily



heartily laugh at it. But the miserable deception lies here, that while very quick-sighted about the faults of our brethren, we are blind to our own. Our own deformities we chuse to carry behind; in the ridiculous conceit, that because we do not see them, no mortal can; those of others we are resolved shall be always before our face.

But let men think soberly of themselves, and as they ought to think. Will all our words and actions fill the square of the word of God more than those of our neighbour; or in many things do we not all offend our Lord and him? Is he obliged to bear injuries at our hand; and are we not bound to bear injuries at his hand? Who degrades our fellow men and Christians into such beasts of burden? If they do not upon every occasion 'take us by the throat,' saying pay me what thou owest; shall we have the hardiness and ingratitude, to bring them every day, or so often as we think convenient, to a reckoning, and demand immediate payment? Let our Lord decide this point. 'Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brothers eye.' (z)—Again will all our sentiments, when honestly laid in the balances of the sanctuary, stand on the nail? He must have a vast opinion of his own understanding who will venture to affirm it. Well, it is the duty of your brethren to bear with you in your errors and mistakes, granting them to be of some importance? Undoubtedly. Will you then have the face to affirm, that you are discharged from all obligation to bear with them in their errors and mistakes? What is it, I pray, that has made this mighty difference? Suppose, that it is not quite clear whose opinions are just, yours or theirs; have not they as good a right to abide by theirs, to defend them till convicted, and to impose them upon you; as you have

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to support your sentiments and impose them upon your brethren? To our own master, certainly, we stand or fall. Admit that truth and reason are upon your side; still the question is, who invested you with a right to judge for them? You are accountable for your advantages; so are they; but their faith is as little hung upon your sleeve, as your faith upon their sleeve. And

FIRSTLY, An *unforbearing* spirit is the very spirit of *Antichrist*. To name the *man of sin*, is to call up a set of very shocking ideas in the mind of every true *Protestant*. For while he sits in the temple of God, avows himself to be the vicar of Jesus Christ, and the visible head of the catholic church; he is at open and perpetual war with the Lord of glory, his cause and people. But what is his spirit? Does it not much ly, in presumptuously fixing those things as *necessary*, at least in point of order, which Christ has left *indifferent*; and in positively determining, by his sole authority, those things as *certain*, which all the world, without his tenuous assistance, would have allowed to be *disputable*; and then imposing his pretended light upon all churches, and all Christians? So that if they would, in all points, be led to heaven, without a slip by the way, they have no more to do, than to put out their eyes, and commit themselves, in the fullest assurance, to his infallible conduct. What he aimed at, by an inexplicable mystery of iniquity, and actually obtained throughout the greatest part of the christian world, was the firm holding of every mans faith and conscience, upon this arrogant pretence, that he was constituted the ultimate and unerring judge of all controversies. From small, very small beginnings, matters were driven so far, 'that no man might buy or sell, 'save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, 'or the number of his name,' (a) who were not impli-

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itly obedient to popish briefs and mandates, sentences and rescripts.

And though it should be thought a hard saying, and alarm the jealousy of some; we are bold to affirm, that where ever we observe an unforbearing professor, there you have a *little Pope*, a *little Antichrist*. He may be a valuable person, nay, in other things, an eminent Christian; but the same spirit is in so far working in him, as in the Roman Pontiff: a spirit which would have all his brethren brought to his feet, and obliged, under pain of excommunication from the church of the living God, to kiss them with the profoundest devotion:—and a spirit, to the encroachments of which, there is no end. Like the great Antichrist, yield to it in one thing, and it is thereby emboldened to demand obedience in another. It may at first only insist on our receiving this trifling opinion, or that unimportant circumstance of worship and order; and then it is prepared to dictate our whole creed, and regulate every part of our course. In the same manner as the son of perdition ascended his throne, it will proceed from less to more, till at length nothing will please, unless every word and action, every opinion and observance, receive the sanction of its supreme authority. Ah the shame, the palpable contradiction, that such a spirit should prevail and be cherished amongst those, who pretend to glory in the name of PROTESTANTS!

SIXTHLY, The *peace* of the church requires this forbearance. Peace will be a great object to every gracious person, under the influence of the Spirit of Christ. We are commanded to 'follow peace with all men,' (b) even when it flies from us to pursue it earnestly. With the greatest tenderness and solicitude is it to be cultivated in the church. And be at peace among yourselves. Let us therefore follow after, the things which make for peace, and things wherewith



'where with we may edify one another.' (c) Peace is an important fruit of the death of Christ, (d) a rich legacy of his testament, (e) and the matter of his intercession within the vail. (f) And there is nothing which the Lord's people, acting in character, are more zealous about. They pray earnestly for the peace of Jerusalem, and industriously seek it by all means in their power, (g) It may be purchased at too high a price; but never, as we saw before, when truth and a good conscience are safe. Then we can offer no sacrifice too costly to preserve it when in danger, or to recover it when lost.

But without forbearing one another, peace is not to be expected: It is impossible, in the very nature of things, while the church is in a militant state, because so long we are imperfect. Offences and injuries will be committed: differences in lesser things must necessarily obtain. The latter is as unavoidable as the former; while there are such differences of capacity, of advantages, and of spiritual illumination. The saints will shortly come to the perfect unity of the faith, and knowledge of the son of God; but not till they come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. What is to be done with these lesser differences? What, indeed, but to forbear one another in love? The sword of every church member, without this, must be in the side of his fellow. He is offended at me, because I presume to differ from him; I am offended at him because he presumes to differ from me. Hence discord and contention must rage from generation to generation. Zion, instead of being a quiet habitation, is a tumultuous scene of brawling, and of blood. And you will observe, that when peace is once fled from the church, every thing valuable is upon the point of making a retreat. Mutual confidence is at an end: mutual edification can have no place: the regular dispensation and enjoyment of ordinances is, at least, suspended.

c 1 Thess. v. 13. Rom. xiv. 19. d Eph. ii. 14.  
 15. 16. e John xiv. 27. f Chap. xvii. 21, 22, 23. g Psal.  
 cxvii. 6.--9.

ed. The whole soul and spirit of the society is collected into wrangling and disorder. Hence that society, how strongly soever it has been compacted, shakes to the foundation; and unless peace, with its harbinger and attendant forbearance, be recovered, must very soon be necessarily dissolved and fall in ruins: for what house or kingdom divided against itself can stand? If we have the least desire, therefore, that peace may continue in our time, and that Zion be established, it is not in our choice whether we shall forbear one another in love. You notice the connexion, which this verse has with the subsequent one, — *Forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.* It plainly supposes, that this unity and peace were not to be enjoyed without forbearance in love. It was utterly in vain to look for them. There may as soon be motion without life in an animal, or a house without a foundation.

SEVENTHLY, The credit of religion should impel us to the exercise of forbearance. The cause of Christ has never been generally respectable in the world, nor is there a probability of its becoming so very soon. In times like ours, that system of religion which the many wonder at, is to be greatly suspected; rather, because it is the fashion, we may be certain it is *false and spurious*. There must be some corrupt mixture which adapts it to the taste of the multitude. We are bound, however, to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and should be more cautious of doing any thing to its discredit than of the depredations of the thief, or of the attacks of a desperate assassin; for in so far as we injure it, we crucify Christ afresh and put him to an open shame; while we are guilty of murdering the precious souls of men.

Now, on the one hand, there is not any thing, which more recommends the cause of truth and religion to those around us, than the loving, peaceable, forbearing

forbearing spirit and conduct of its friends. Where-  
 ever that has prevailed, it has carried in its hand letters  
 of credence, known and read of all men, to the care-  
 less and even to the prejudiced. There is in it some-  
 thing so amiable, praise worthy and attractive, as  
 must command the respect even of its enemies. On  
 innumerable occasions, it has not only abated, but  
 cured their prejudices, and, through the Lord's bles-  
 sing, proved an effectual mean of winning their hearts  
 to Christ and his people. What a mighty power,  
 will they cry, must there be in the truth as it is. Je-  
 sus, that can accomplish so thorough a change on the  
 spirits of men; rendering them loving, sweet, humble  
 and benevolent, that were envious and sour, proud,  
 selfish and malignant? How pleasant the tabernacles  
 where such a spirit reigns! Thus when the primitive  
 Christians were of one heart and of one soul, they had  
 favour with all the people; and the Lord added to  
 the church daily such as should be saved. (g) Our  
 Lord speaks as if the very credibility of his mis-  
 sion did not a little depend upon the operation of this  
 spirit amongst his followers. 'That they all may be  
 one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee; that  
 they also may be one in us; that the world may be-  
 lieve that thou has sent me.' (h) But, on the other  
 hand, there is not any thing which more forcibly  
 strikes the attention, and alienates the hearts of men  
 from Christ and his cause, than the unforbearing,  
 captious, and litigious spirit of his professed follow-  
 ers. They are apt to bless themselves in their distance  
 from such ferment and brawling. 'O my soul, will,  
 they say, come not thou into their secret; unto their  
 assembly, mine honour, be not thou united.' Who  
 would rush into an house in flames, and think of a-  
 king up his residence there? Who would chuse to  
 be at sea in a tempest, when one mountain of wreck  
 is heaved to the shore after another? Suppose the  
*first*



*first* discharge to be against contentious church members themselves, it is a heavy one. Spectators will either hold them a set of religious knaves, who have assumed the form, without imbibing any thing of the spirit of christianity, and hate them most heartily as such : or they will stand by, deriding them as a parcel of silly brainsick fools. The *second* discharge, (and against these too, the first is ultimately aimed), is always directed against the glorious person whom they call their master, and his good ways which they profess : for they cannot see, nor for their hearts believe, the power of those truths and ordinances which suffers Christians, like so many beasts of prey, to bite and and tear one another on the most trifling occasions. These proceedings have, in fact, done more hurt to the honour and interests of religion in the world, than all the ridicule and violence of persecution, which its avowed enemies, without such provocation, ever poured upon it. And shall we, I beseech you, in the latter end have comfort, in holding up Christ and his work for a laughing-stock to a careless and prejudiced generation, or in casting blocks in the way of our fellow creatures, over which they may stumble into endless perdition ?

Several other things might have been suggested ; such as, that forbearance is a grace of the spirit as precious in its place as any other ; without the exercise of which, in relation to its proper objects, we can have no satisfying evidence to ourselves, nor can we prove to others, that we are partakers of grace at all ; that it exceedingly disconcerts the schemes of satan against the Lord's work and people ; that the more a Christian shines in scriptural forbearance, the more comfortable he is to his glorious head, the more respect and confidence he will meet with from his brethren, when they are restored to their right mind ; and that to the exercise of forbearance we are in different ways most solemnly engaged.—But the discourse is so much lengthened already, that we must leave these and other

ther considerations to your own meditation. This subject, suitably reflected upon, will shew,

**FIRST,** That forbearance in love does not merit the contempt and scorn, which is poured upon it by some. We hope better things of many of you; but so ungoverned and unthinking are the spirits of men in different quarters, that they would not be more alarmed by a drawn sword pointed at their breasts, than by the mention of forbearance; nor is there a lie in the whole system of *Mahometan* imposture that would be more derided. Astonishing! That any should be such strangers to themselves and to the very nature and state of all human society! Shall the very shades of difference instantaneously proselyte us to the Romish beast? Will we presume to be merry with, or burn in indignation at the glory and authority of Christ Jesus the Lord? Dare we treat the prosperity, nay the very existence of the city of the living God, to which we are under so many obligations, with ridicule and scorn? We shall admit, that not a little of the jealousy and contempt with which the doctrine and practice of forbearance in those evil times are received, even by gracious persons, have been occasioned by the shocking abuse and prostitution of it amongst people of different denominations. But what truth, ordinance or christian duty has not been abused? Must we therefore relinquish them? Are we unable to distinguish things most obviously different? If, in relation to certain objects, forbearance in a state of church fellowship can have no place, must the door be absolutely shut against it, in relation to these objects where it is recommended and enjoined by God himself? Were Gallio and Paul men of the same spirit, because the *one* cared nothing for Christ and his cause, and because the *other* directs us to forbear one another in love? Let us, my brethren, take heed how we profane or devour what is holy.

SECOND.

SECONDLY, It leads us, to weep over the low state of religion amongst us. The prophet goes before us, ' Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people. (1) It is not with us, alas! as in months past. Our sun has gone down at noon. What are many professors, but shadows of christianity, mere skeletons in religion; by their fruits you shall know them. Too many of the Lord's people themselves are become as the heath in the desert. Amongst other evidences of our languishing condition, this is none of the least, though not so often mentioned, that christian forbearance seems on the very point of expulsion. Does not this incontestibly prove, that brotherly love is decayed? And will not this again convincingly show, that the Spirit of grace in all his influences is mournfully withdrawn? Were it not so, it is impossible, that things should wear the present gloomy aspect. Alas for the divisions of Reuben! Should they not cause great searchings of heart? They are evil things themselves, very evil; but they are only the alarming symptoms of worse. Yes; my friends, we are alienated from Christ, and must be estranged from one another. He is the corner stone of the church. The more closely his people are joined to him in their exercise, the more firmly are they cemented among themselves. Jealousies and emulations, variance and wrath amongst them, demonstrate they have fallen from him. Answer me, you who believe; is the spirit of forbearance extinguished in your breast, or ready to expire? How, then, pray, does your soul prosper? Does not your leanness testify against you? Are not many gray hairs scattered upon your head, if you would but observe them? Is fellowship with your brethren as pleasant and fruitful, as it has been? Is your communion with God as intimate,

sensible



sensible and refreshing? Have you wanted enlargements at the throne of grace, and has the gospel lost nothing of its relish? Are your graces as lively and vigorous, your corruptions as much under laws and harrows of iron, as before you were captivated? No, sirs: it cannot be. The Lord must correct you. An evil disease preys on your spiritual constitution. That must be healed or you die daily. Apply to the Physician before it acquire greater strength. Take no peace, till the chains of that perverse spirit be knocked off.

THIRDLY, It calls loudly upon us to strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die. These things are precious. Our Lord has a deep concern in them, and so have we, both in our single and social state. Since zeal is like to die with many, and brotherly love with others, these should be some of our principal objects. They open a large field for *ministers*. All the powers with which they are indowed, should be called forth to revive them. But there is much need to distrust ourselves, implore and singly depend upon the wisdom from above. It is easy to give the ark of God a wrong touch; but it requires peculiar dexterity to establish it when shaking. Our way is sometimes hid, and, even when pointed out, it is sometimes intricate and perplexed; but our counsellor is not perished. Our work is often hard; but God himself is a co-worker with us. The obligation reaches to *church members* of every description. If you can do any thing for us, and for one another, refuse not your help. The Lord has need of it. Look to yourselves. See that ye be always zealously affected in a good thing; but never suffer your zeal to transport you beyond your knowledge, or become disproportioned to its object. If so, it is either unhallowed fire, or irregular and dangerous in its operations. Let your zeal be always tempered with forbearance in love. Cherish this

amiable winning disposition; and preserve a strict guard against every thing which would extinguish or check it. Avoid the contagion of unforbearing spirits, as you would a madman, scattering about fire brands, arrows and death: and be active in diffusing, according to your station and opportunities, the amiable spirit by which you are led, to all your connexions. 'Blessed are the peace makers: for they shall be called the children of God.' (k)

FOURTHLY, It shows the necessity of self denial. This is amongst the first lessons which Christ teaches his disciples. 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. (l) Greater proficiency in it should be our daily endeavour. The grounds of it are many. In what point of view soever you consider man, *pride* is not made for him. The calls to humility are loud and unceasing; particularly, without large measures of this, we will not, we cannot forbear one another. Hence before the apostle enjoins the one, he recommends the other. The proud must always be overbearing, stiff and opinionative. The lowly, so far as they lawfully may, will be gentle, yielding and submissive. Wherefore let us be clothed with humility. For this purpose, let us never forget, that we possess no more than what we have received. Let our native, our continued guilt and baseness, be never out of view; and let the example of your gracious Lord be our unwearied and pleasant study; who, though in the form of God, condescended to be made of no reputation, and cheerfully submitted to the meanest offices of love towards his disciples. 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' (m) It is to the poor and contrite in spirit that the eyes of the Lord are turned; and such alone can expect a quiet passage through life. For in this point, at least, of resisting the proud, all men are agreed with God.

YINTAL

FIFTH.

4 Math. v. 9. 10. 11. Matth xviii. 40. 12. Math. xi. 29.

**FIFTHLY.** It recommends meekness. This is a grace nearly allied to the former, and no less necessary in order to forbearance. Hence it is ranked in the same class in the passage before us. The still voice of forbearance cannot be heard in the midst of rough, noisy and boisterous passions. You may as well harangue the tempest, as think to procure it a hearing in those circumstances. But meekness stands armed at all points for injuries and opposition. It is like bags of wool suspended on the walls of a besieged fortress, upon which the largest and best directed shot makes no impression. Besides that it disposes a man to ponder every step in his conduct toward his brethren, in order to prevent all unnecessary grounds of offence. For 'a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.' (u) It is an unhappy thing to carry breasts full of tinder, which the smallest collision will set in a blaze. How unlike is it to Christ and the spirit of his holy religion? It puts our peace and comfort, too, in the power of every knave or fool; and instead of casting water on the coals of contention when kindled, it constantly supplies and heaps up the fuel. Let us 'put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering.' (v) Thus if differences and offences must come, we will consider them coolly; and if so, they will sink before us. How often in our cool dispassionate moments, have we been astonished and ashamed, that we should have been moved with trifles which, in another hour, appeared insurmountable and unpardonable? Let us at least grow wise by experience. We have profited little by the different scenes of life which we have gone through, and in which we have acted a very foolish part, if we have not learned to hold a stricter rein upon our own spirits.

**SIXTHLY,**

Prov. xviii. 19. Col. iii. 12



**SIXTHLY**, It urges us to arm against the devices of Satan. He loves to fish in troubled waters, because in them generally his success is greatest. He is sure to kindle a fire where he finds suitable fuel. It is a sport for him to do mischief: and there is nothing affords him more diversion than the debates and contention of brethren. It shall go hard, if this be not made his harvest. Among other names which he bears, which should fill us with jealousy and double our guard, this is one,—the *Accuser* of the brethren. He accuses them day and night before God, and to one another. If he can pick up a tale to dissolve their friendship, it shall be circulated with assiduity, and with every circumstance of aggravation. Nay there is not any thing they say or do, be it ever so innocent, well intended or even useful, but he can put a bad construction upon; when he intends they should fall by each others hands. Nor is he at any loss to paint objects to every man's taste. This is one favourite method of scattering the seeds of discord and strife. And, alas! it has often proved a successful one. Be not ignorant of his devices. Sometimes his wiles are so subtle, that they are executed before we can see through them; but here, if we would suitably attend, there is little mystery. Whether he assume the form of an angel of light, or appear in his own proper shape, to a discerning eye he stands almost equally the *DEVIL confessed*. So soon as you perceive him, quit you like men, be strong. Unless he be powerfully rebuked, if he can turn his little finger between you and your brethren, the whole arm will follow. When the snare is not seen, we do well to suspect it. An unforbearing contentious spirit never prevails, but he blows the coals. Under the Lord's conduct you will quickly discover his forge, and the work which he has on the anvil. Apply therefore to him, to whom darkness is as the light.

**SEVENTHLY**, It should send us to the throne  
of

of grace with importunate supplications for the Spirit of Christ. Our unforbearance and disorders of every kind are the mournful consequence of his influences being suspended. The one as necessary, and therefore as constantly, follows upon the other, as darkness succeeds light, and cold succeeds heat in the absence of the sun. And till the Spirit be restored, the decayed face of the church cannot possibly be renewed. There is no other cause adequate to this glorious effect. ' Upon the land of the daughter of my people shall come up thorns and briers, yea upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city:—until the Spirit be poured on us from on high.' (p) This again would convert the wilderness into a fruitful field; the work of God in all its branches would be revived: particularly, as he is the Spirit of peace, of love and of a sound mind, our contentions would quickly cease, and our divisions be healed. We would see so much eye to eye in the matters of God, as without a single jar to unite our voices in his praise. Is not the Spirit still in the promise? Are we not invited, commanded to believe, and plead the accomplishment of the promise? I will pour water on him that is thirsty, ' and floods upon the dry ground.' (q) ' I will be as the dew to Israel, he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.' (r) Ye that make mention of the name of the Lord, give him no rest till, by the abundant effusion of his Spirit, he make us glad according to the days in which we have seen evil and had grief. The grounds of faith and expectation are still sure. Against hope, let us try to believe in hope. He hath torn and he will heal us, he hath smitten and he will bind us up.

p 1st xxxii. 13. 15.

q Chap. xlv. 3.

r Hof. xiv. 56. mid

T H E E N D.

18 AP 68



